

## [Mr. John Oliphant]

1

[?] [(Life sketch)?]

Federal Writers' Project

F W Kaul—L A Rollins,

Hastings, Nebraska.

Source:

Interview with Mr. John Oliphant,

6th and Briggs, Hastings, Nebraska.

I was born March 5, 1883 in Adams County, six miles northwest of Hastings. My parents moved to Hastings when I was a little boy. I had made a few grades in the Schumway school and finished the rest of the grades in the ward school of Hastings. I started to work when I was 14 and have been going ever since. First I worked as a delivery boy in a butcher shop. I held the job six years, perhaps a little longer. My next job was that of grocery salesman, wholesale groceries. I worked for this firm 20 years. Salesmen [?] could sell real orders in those days.

I have many recollections of the time I spent as a boy on the farm. I think mother was the best cook, I have ever known and her best dish was apple dumpling with dip. She would peel a half bushel of apples at a time, core them, place a sugar syrup with vanilla flavor in the space where the core was and put them together again and place the apple on a piece of rolled out bread dough and wrap the dough around the apple and twist it at the top, then she would place them in an iron kettle which was standing on the fire which kettle

## Library of Congress

contained hot water and lard mixed. Whe would place three dozen of these apples in the hot kettle and would continue the process until all the apples were prepared. The reason she had to make so many at a time was because there was six brothers and four sisters who all had a hearty appetite for mother's apple dumplings with dip were outstanding.

Among other outstanding incidents of my boy hood life on the farm are the parties we sued to have. Young people would gather weekly at one of their homes usually on a Friday evening. After the usual greetings were over the young people [ould?] sing a number of old time songs and play games. Among the songs were such as "When you and I were young, Maggie," "Yankee Doodle," "Old Black Joe," "Way down upon the Swanee River," and "John's Body,"

2

We played such games as "Drop the Handkerchief," "Spring Platter," "Tin, Tin, Come in," Ring around the Rosy," "Button, Button who's got the Button," "Fruit Basket, and others. Before the party broke up we partook of a lunch which the guests had brought along in baskets. We went home all having had a good time and knowing that we would have an equally good time at the next party.

The folks always had company on Sunday, when the neighbors would call and visit. Butching day was a great day during the winter. Father butchered several hogs at a time. The neighbors would help him. The reason I remember butchering day so well is because from that day on for a long season we would have plenty of good sausages flavored with sage. Mother would serve these sausages with hot cakes and syrup for breakfast. Father prepared his own brine and cured the meat for six weeks, when the hams and bacons were smoked and packed in oats for summer use. I was married in 1904. I have only daughter. We attend the Methodist Church.

While I have no faith in superstitions, my mother did. She used to tell us that if a bird flew into the house and out again someone would presently die in the family or relationship.

## Library of Congress

She often related an incident of this nature which was supposed to have announced to her the death of my oldest brother. On the morning of his death a robin flew into the house and left again. Mother related this to us many times.

My wife believed if one would kill a cat it meant seven years of bad luck. She connected the same superstition with the breaking of a mirror and even cry over the same. If we would be out driving and a black cat would cross our path, she forced me to go back fearing that some unfortunate thing would happen. My wife's mother believed that a cow could be bewitched when the milk went bad. In that case they would call a neighboring witch doctor to treat the cow. The treatment consisted in splitting the cow's tail open with a curved knife and putting something into this opening and closing the 3 incision. What the witch doctor placed into the opening was never revealed, that was the mystery of the treatment. My mother-in-law claimed that this treatment would invariably restore the production of good milk. My wife's mother was a Russian.

In the 90's the local Catholic convent situated in the northwestern part of Hastings was vacant for some time. The saying arose that the place was haunted. The one horse carryalls conducted quite a business taking people to and from the convent to examine its weirdness personally. It is said that groaning sounds were heard within the dark walls of the convent but whence they came no one knew. I was 10 or 12 years old at that time and I well recall this incident.

An incident that amused me when I was a traveling salesman took place at Bloomington, Nebraska, as follows. A farmer came into the drug store of that town purchased a pocket book and had it charged. A similar incident took place in Western Kansas, a merchant had purchased a new check protector. A check given me in the [amount?] of \$22 or \$23 was the first check protected by the machine, however protected as the check was it bounced back."